



STORY SLUG:.....**20/20; [CORR20/20; [CORR**

PRODUCER:.....**ABC NEWS**

INTERVIEWER:.....**JOHN STOSSEL**

INTERVIEWEES:

CHERYL BROWN, DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, DOCTOR
MICHAEL NADER, DOCTOR SALLY SATEL, DOCTOR
STANTON PEELE, FEMALE EIGHT, FEMALE FIVE, FEMALE
FOUR, FEMALE NINE, FEMALE ONE, FEMALE SEVEN,
FEMALE SIX, FEMALE TEN, FEMALE THREE, FEMALE TWO,
GREG, JAMES FREY, JANNA HAMEL, JEAN BROCHU,
JENNIFER PORTNICK, JODI VALENTINO, JOHANNA
LAURENT, JOHN DIVANNY, KAY SHEPPARD, LIZ, MALE
FIVE, MALE FOUR, MALE ONE, MALE SIX, MALE THREE,
MALE TWO, MICHAEL SCOTT, NANCY MATTSON, OPRAH
WINFREY, PETER JENNINGS, ROGER GARNEAU, SCOTT
PETERSON, STEPHEN DEWEY, STEVEN HIGGINS, STEVEN
LOZOWICKI, SUE SILVERMAN, TRISTAN DARLAND

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INTERVIEWEES: Cheryl Brown, Doctor Jeffrey Schaler, Doctor Michael Nader, Doctor Sally Satel,

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[SHOW: NMG]

[SLUG: HELP ME, I CAN'T HELP MYSELF]

[AIRDTE: 04/21/03]

[AIRTIME: 20:00, 21:00]

[ANCH: JOHN STOSSEL]

[ANCHLOC: NEW YORK, NY USA]

[STORY: 20/20]

[CORR]

[CORLOC]

[01]06:27:31

ANNOUNCER

They're all over television, people going public about gorging, gambling, smoking, drinking.

[01]06:27:41

OPRAH WINFREY, TALK SHOW HOST

It really is like a disease. It is addiction.

[01]06:27:44

ANNOUNCER

But is addiction a disease out of your control, or is it an excuse to blame others?

[01]06:27:50

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) You know that gambling, the house wins.

[01]06:27:54

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

I was sick. Those machines make me sick.

[01]06:27:57

ANNOUNCER

Tonight, a different way to think about the bad habit you can't seem to kick. Maybe you can, if you really want to.

[01]06:28:05

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

Addiction is a behavior, and all behaviors are choices.

[01]06:28:09

ANNOUNCER

Meet a sex addict who spent years in therapy.

[01]06:28:12

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Nobody said, "just stop it, don't do it"?

[01]06:28:13

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

No, no.

[01]06:28:15

ANNOUNCER

And a man hooked on cocaine and alcohol.

[01]06:28:18

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) How did you stop?

[01]06:28:19

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I have my own 12-step program, and the first 11 steps don't mean (CENSORED BY NETWORK) and the 12th is "don't do it."

[01]06:28:26

ANNOUNCER

Are you part of America's so-called addiction to food? These women say it's not their fault they're fat.

[01]06:28:34

FEMALE THREE, EVENT ATTENDEE

It's gonna be easier to change society than it is to change my body, so that's what I'm working on.

[01]06:28:38

ANNOUNCER

But some experts say you have the power to change. No more excuses, no more saying, "Help Me, I Can't Help Myself." Here is John Stossel.

[GRAPHICS: HELP ME I CAN'T HELP MYSELF WITH JOHN STOSSEL]

[01]06:28:50

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Addiction, the dictionary defines it as "compulsive need." The implication is that if you're addicted, you're helpless. You have no free will. Sounds right. Watching TV, you'd think the whole country's addicted to something.

[01]06:29:08

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) Flicking channels just one day this fall, we caught this piece on people supposedly addicted to an Internet video game. The same day on "Dr. Phil", and on "20/20"....

[01]06:29:27

DOCTOR STANTON PEELE, AUTHOR "DISEASING OF AMERICA"

We're discovering that people can be addicted to just about everything, and that leads us to think nobody can control anything.

[01]06:29:34

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Stanton Peele is the author of the "Diseasing of America."

[01]06:29:38

DOCTOR STANTON PEELE, AUTHOR "DISEASING OF AMERICA"

The United States has elevated addiction to a national icon. It's our symbol, it's our excuse.

[01]06:29:45

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

I just had to keep doing it because that was the only time I felt love.

[01]06:29:50

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Sue Silverman says she was a sex addict.

[01]06:29:53

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

It was such a compulsion that I felt I had to do it over and over and over again.

[01]06:29:58

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) She wrote a book about it titled "Love Sick." That's earned her applause, an honorary college degree. She says the college and talk shows, love the idea of sex as addiction.

[01]06:30:11

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

Sex was my drug of choice. I was like a love junkie.

[01]06:30:13

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Why do you call it an addiction?

[01]06:30:15

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

I couldn't stop it for years.

[01]06:30:18

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Couldn't stop it? I mean, you could just stop it, not do it?

[01]06:30:24

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

If I'd had somebody like you to say that to me . . .

[01]06:30:28

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) She says she went to ten therapists. Not one told her to stop or that it was her fault. She said it was her father's fault.

[01]06:30:36

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

I absolutely would not have been a sex addict if he hadn't molested me.

[01]06:30:40

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Blaming others is popular today.

[01]06:30:49

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) Lawyers have already used this argument to win billions from tobacco companies. And what's next? Well, ever play one of these video slot machines? In Canada, some lawyers are now suing the government, saying it, by operating these machines, is responsible for getting people addicted.

[01]06:31:07

ROGER GARNEAU, LAWYER

This machine is eating your money very, very quickly. And there is nothing that a player can do. He was helpless.

[01]06:31:17

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) He is Jean Brochu, a lawyer himself. This lawyer didn't know he could lose all that money?

[01]06:31:22

ROGER GARNEAU, LAWYER

No, he didn't know.

[01]06:31:24

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

I think it's the government's fault.

[01]06:31:27

ROGER GARNEAU, LAWYER

He was not aware that the machine was built in order to cheat him. He couldn't believe it.

[01]06:31:33

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) You didn't know you could lose money?

[01]06:31:36

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

No, not, not the. . .

[01]06:31:39

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) You were putting the money in?

[01]06:31:40

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

I think that the machine give me the money, okay?

[01]06:31:43

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) But you're not a dumb guy. You're a lawyer.

[01]06:31:47

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

No. Yeah.

[01]06:31:47

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) You know that gambling, the house wins?

[01]06:31:50

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

I was sick. Those machines make me sick.

[01]06:31:54

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) He says his sickness led him to embezzle \$50,000 to put into the machines. And the government's responsible, says Brochu, because there aren't enough warnings on the machines. Gamblers we talked to pointed out warnings are all over the place.

[01]06:32:09

MALE ONE, GAMBLER

Unless you're blind, and you can't look at the big posters up there or the little stickers up here, I say you're blind.

[01]06:32:17

MALE TWO, GAMBLER

What about if this guy was always winning? What would he say about the government? "Yeah, I love the government."

[01]06:32:23

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Brochu insists the government made him sick. And he's suing them for \$50,000 to restore his dignity and pay his therapy bills. Illness suggests he can't help himself. But he could have stopped.

[01]06:32:39

ROGER GARNEAU, LAWYER

Could he?

[01]06:32:41

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

I don't think so.

[01]06:32:42

ROGER GARNEAU, LAWYER

The experts say he couldn't, because he was addicted.

[01]06:32:47

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

They use the idea that addiction is a disease to make more money for themselves. They're addicted to money.

[01]06:32:53

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Psychologist Jeff Schaler has written a book called "Addiction is a Choice."

[01]06:32:57

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

Addiction is a behavior, and all behaviors are choices. What's next? Are we going to blame fast food restaurants for the foods that they sell based on the marketing, because the person got addicted to hamburgers and French fries?

[01]06:33:10

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Well, yes, actually. Two weeks after he said that, some children sued McDonald's.

[01]06:33:15

PETER JENNINGS, ABC NEWS

(OC) They blame McDonald's for causing them to become obese.

[01]06:33:19

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) They've lost the first round in court, but they're trying again.

[01]06:33:22

DOCTOR STANTON PEELE, AUTHOR "DISEASING OF AMERICA"

It pays to say you're addicted. It pays to say you're out of control. People aren't stupid. They recognize that this is the best excuse they can offer.

[01]06:33:30

NANCY MATTSON, LAWYER

She just simply could not control the spending.

[01]06:33:34

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) "Impulse control disorder" is the excuse Rosemary Heinen's lawyer used to explain Heinen's shopping. Heinen was a corporate manager at Starbucks who embezzled \$3.7 million, which she then used to buy things, lots of things. When police checked out her property, they found 32 cars and much more.

[01]06:34:03

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) In her house, there were hundreds of Barbie dolls. Her lawyer says she didn't steal the \$3 million for pleasure.

[01]06:34:12

NANCY MATTSON, LAWYER

As much as she was buying, she wasn't enjoying these items once she had them. They were stored away, collecting dust. Now, there are a few exceptions to that. She bought a yacht for her husband.

[01]06:34:32

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) In court, a psychiatrist testified she was unable to obey the law.

[01]06:34:38

NANCY MATTSON, LAWYER

She shouldn't get what the state's asking for.

[01]06:34:40

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) What the state was asking for was a seven-year jail sentence.

[01]06:34:44

NANCY MATTSON, LAWYER

She's a sick woman.

[01]06:34:47

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) This is not a new idea. "West Side Story" poked fun at this years ago. And plenty of people have argued that being psychologically disturbed should excuse them from punishment if they break a law.

[01]06:35:19

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) When Washington's mayor, Marion Barry, was caught smoking crack, he complained that because of his sickness, he shouldn't have had to go to jail. The argument didn't work for him, but it did work for the man who stabbed Monica Seles. He said he was sick with love for Seles' rival, Steffi Graf. A judge agreed, and set him free, saying, he might not have been responsible for his actions.

[01]06:35:45

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) Would the "I did it, but I'm not responsible" defense work for Rosemary Heinen? It shouldn't, said the prosecutor.

[01]06:35:52

SCOTT PETERSON, PROSECUTOR

Most people who commit a crime, any kind of crime, have some sort of personality or mental disorder. But that still doesn't mean that she was unable to stop stealing. If that was the standard, I guess we would never ever prosecute pedophiles. After all, they suffer from pedophilia.

[01]06:36:05

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) The judge did put Heinen in jail. Would the "helplessly addicted" defense work for Jean Brochu? The prosecutor wanted to lock you up.

[01]06:36:16

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

Yeah.

[01]06:36:18

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) But you're not in jail.

[01]06:36:19

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

No, I'm not in jail. I'm still out. The judge said that, "yes, Mr. Brochu is sick."

[01]06:36:26

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) The judge gave him probation and told him, "see a psychologist." His mother paid back the money he stole. You stole \$50,000. You chose to do that. You weren't helpless.

[01]06:36:39

JEAN BROCHU, LAWYER

I don't chose to do that. I was sick. I was in another world.

[01]06:36:44

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Now he and his lawyer are suing on behalf of all addicted gamblers in Quebec, claiming the government's responsible for getting them addicted, too. What do you want?

[01]06:36:53

ROGER GARNEAU, LAWYER

\$700 million.

[01]06:36:55

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Think you'll win?

[01]06:36:58

ROGER GARNEAU, LAWYER

I'm very confident.

[01]06:37:00

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) He should be. Increasingly, society is accepting this idea that addiction is someone else's fault.

[01]06:37:08

ANNOUNCER

Scientists are choosing sides. Some say addicts become helpless.

[01]06:37:11

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) They don't have free will?

[01]06:37:12

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

That's correct. They actually lose their free will, it becomes so overwhelming.

[01]06:37:16

DOCTOR SALLY SATEL, PSYCHIATRIST

I think it's very harmful to tell people they have no control over behavior when they do.

[01]06:37:21

ANNOUNCER

When "John Stossel" continues.

[GRAPHICS: HELP ME I CAN'T HELP MYSELF WITH JOHN STOSSEL]

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

[01]06:39:53

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Some say addiction's a choice. That idea's easier to accept if you think about addiction to things like sex or gambling. But when it comes to tobacco, or alcohol, or heroin, is it really a choice? Addicts will tell you those drugs do things to you.

[01]06:40:12

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I was completely out of control. I couldn't control myself at all.

[01]06:40:18

LIZ, RECOVERING HEROIN ADDICT

You have to have it. You don't have a choice once you get hooked on it.

[01]06:40:22

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Many scientists say addicts have literally lost control, that they suffer from a disease.

[01]06:40:31

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) This is our government's official policy. And government-funded researchers, like Stephen Dewey of Brookhaven National Labs, tend to agree enthusiastically. They say their studies of addiction in monkeys and rats show addiction's a brain disease.

[01]06:40:46

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

Addiction is a disease that's characterized by a loss of control. That is, the inability. . .

[01]06:40:53

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) An inability? They're out of control?

[01]06:40:56

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

They're absolutely out of control. They lose cortical function, frontal lobe function in their brain that allows them to incorporate and make executive decisions.

[01]06:41:08

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Dewey takes this message to schools, showing kids brain scans which he says prove his point.

[01]06:41:13

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

The cocaine abuser has destroyed many of his dopamine receptors.

[01]06:41:19

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) The kids are impressed. Dewey tells them addiction causes chemical changes that hijack your brain. And he and others say our genes predispose some of us to addiction's loss of control. Researchers at Harvard believe they've found one of those genes in the zebrafish.

[01]06:41:39

TRISTAN DARLAND, RESEARCHER

That's how I know they're stoned a lot of times, is they do this little circling thing.

[01]06:41:45

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) When researcher Tristan Darland puts cocaine on a pad and sticks it on one side of a fish tank, fish like the feeling they get so much, they hang around the area, even after the cocaine's removed. Then he bred a family of fish that had one gene altered. These fish turned out to be immune to the lure of the cocaine. They swim back and forth between both sides of the tank, while the other fish stay on the side where they'd gotten stoned. Darland says this shows that addiction's largely genetic.

[01]06:42:14

TRISTAN DARLAND, RESEARCHER

These fish don't know anything about peer pressure. They either respond or they don't respond to the drug.

[01]06:42:21

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Proof, he says, that drugs can hijack the brain. At the Medical College of Wisconsin, Dr. Robert Risinger scans the brains of human addicts while they watch a video of people getting high on crack. It's what they call a "craving" video. He then shows them a hard-core sex film. The brain scans show the addicts get more excited by the craving videos. The drugs become more powerful than sex, because addiction's a disease that changes your brain, says Dewey.

[01]06:42:51

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

There's evidence that in chronic use of the drug, those changes don't come back.

[01]06:42:55

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) They don't have free will?

[01]06:42:56

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

That's correct. They actually lose their free will, it becomes so overwhelming.

[01]06:43:01

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) And if they've lost their free will, how can you blame them for taking drugs?

[01]06:43:05

LIZ, RECOVERING HEROIN ADDICT

You're not a horrible person, you have a horrible disease.

[01]06:43:08

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Liz is a former heroin addict.

[01]06:43:10

LIZ, RECOVERING HEROIN ADDICT

It's definitely a disease. Well, that's what they tell us. I go to NA meetings and we're taught that addiction is, is a disease, just like cancer or anything else. That's the only way I can look at it. Otherwise, I'm just crazy.

[01]06:43:29

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) And scientists say the shock of withdrawal, pictured in movies like this one, illustrate the physical hold of addiction accurately.

[01]06:43:37

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

It sucked. I shook. I threw up. I saw thing that weren't there. It's (CENSORED BY NETWORK) miserable.

[01]06:43:43

LIZ, RECOVERING HEROIN ADDICT

You can't sleep, you can't walk, you can't think.

[01]06:43:47

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Frank Sinatra demonstrated it well in this movie, says Dr. Sally Satel.

[01]06:43:52

DOCTOR SALLY SATEL, PSYCHIATRIST

It's certainly a very intense biological process. But I think it's very harmful to tell people they have no control over a behavior when they do.

[01]06:44:00

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Satel's one of many addiction experts who say the addiction as brain disease theory is harmful to addicts and wrong. What's wrong with calling it a brain disease? It sort of lets the person know it's not all his fault. He's got a real problem.

[01]06:44:15

DOCTOR SALLY SATEL, PSYCHIATRIST

Well, he does have a problem. It's a problem he created, and it's a problem that he has responsibility for solving.

[01]06:44:21

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) But at least it takes the stigma away.

[01]06:44:23

DOCTOR SALLY SATEL, PSYCHIATRIST

Why would you want to take the stigma away? I can't think of anything more worthwhile to stigmatize.

[01]06:44:29

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

People need to get rid of the idea that, that addiction is caused by anything other than themselves. You know, they're not victims of anything other than their own bad decisions.

[01]06:44:40

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) James Frey has written a book about his experience as an addict. He took just about every drug, from alcohol to crack. Did you think about getting high all the time?

[01]06:44:49

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I didn't think about it, I just went and did it.

[01]06:44:52

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Yet he says he wasn't powerless. He scoffs at Dewey's claim that addicts' brains compel them to keep taking drugs. Doctors say, "look at the brain scan."

[01]06:45:01

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I don't particularly care what a doctor tells me. It's a decision. When I pick up this cup of coffee and I take a sip, I'm making a decision to do it because I like it and because I want it, and it doesn't have anything to do with a disease, and it doesn't have anything to do with what a brain scan tells me.

[01]06:45:20

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Many doctors agree, saying, so what if drugs cause changes in the brain, you can still choose not to take them.

[01]06:45:27

DOCTOR SALLY SATEL, PSYCHIATRIST

You can look at brains all day. They can be lit up like Christmas trees. But unless a person behaves in a certain way, we wouldn't call them an addict.

[01]06:45:35

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

Just keeping a rat in a cage, where it is allowed to self-administer any narcotic drug, doesn't prove that people become enslaved to drugs. You have to compare that rat with another rat in a better environment, and see whether the same levels of consumption will occur.

[01]06:45:54

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) They have done that. Scientists in Canada got rats addicted to morphine and then offered them a choice between morphine or water, in two different environments, either alone in these cages or in a nicer place to live, with more space, other rats to play with, a chance to do what rats like to do.

[01]06:46:22

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) Actually, they took a little, but when given a choice, the caged rats drank eight times as much morphine as the rat park rats. Whether you get addicted also depends on how you're treated. Here at Wake Forest University, male monkeys lived together for three months and established a pecking order. It's pretty clear who's boss here. Then Dr. Michael Nader prepared doses of cocaine for them. The monkeys were harnessed to a chair so they wouldn't dislodge a catheter. The monkeys who'd been bullied by the boss monkeys banged the lever to get as much cocaine as they could. But the boss monkeys, just by virtue of being dominant, had less interest in the drug. It's just like the human world, says Nader.

[01]06:47:05

DOCTOR MICHAEL NADER, WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

Individuals that have no control in their job show a greater propensity for substance abuse than those that have control.

[01]06:47:14

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) These comparisons suggest that addiction is a choice, not a disease that takes away free will. But to just stop drinking or using drugs sounds so unlikely. The message from the treatment industry is that you need professional help.

[01]06:47:37

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(OC) These programs make it sound like it's this huge hurdle and only with our help, can you be helped.

[01]06:47:42

DOCTOR SALLY SATEL, PSYCHIATRIST

But people do this all the time.

[01]06:47:45

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) That's true. We seldom hear about it. But studies suggest most addicts who recover do so without professional help.

[01]06:47:55

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) For example, look what happened after the Vietnam War. In Vietnam, heroin was cheap, pure, widely available. Thousands of soldiers became addicted. But most assumed when they'd come home, they'd stop. The government wasn't so sure. So they tracked hundreds of soldiers for three years after they returned home. They found 88 percent of those addicted to narcotics in Vietnam no longer were.

[01]06:48:29

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

What explained why they gave it up? Change of environment. Change in mind-set. It didn't have anything to do with the power of heroin. People love to have a bogeyman. They love to have a devil that is dangerous and scary, that we can fight.

[01]06:48:50

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) But it is a kind of a devil. You have lots of strong people whose lives are wrecked.

[01]06:48:55

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

They wrecked their own lives. The drugs don't do it.

[01]06:48:58

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) We'll be right back.

[01]06:49:00

ANNOUNCER

It's a drag to kick the habit but is nicotine to blame, or is it you?

[01]06:49:05

JODI VALENTINO, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

If you decide to choose to stop smoking, you can.

[01]06:49:08

MALE THREE, CIGARETTE SMOKER

I can't. You can't right now.

[01]06:49:10

JODI VALENTINO, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

Yes, you can. We just choose not to.

[01]06:49:13

ANNOUNCER

When "Help Me, I Can't Help Myself with John Stossel" continues.

[GRAPHICS: HELP ME I CAN'T HELP MYSELF WITH JOHN STOSSEL]

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

[01]06:52:04

ANNOUNCER

"Help Me, I Can't Help Myself" continues. And now, John Stossel.

[01]06:52:10

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) We know how hard it is for addicts to stop using heroin or cocaine, but did you know that quitting tobacco may be just as tough? Government public service announcements say cigarettes are just as addictive as hard drugs.

[01]06:52:34

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) The announcements feature people who say they cannot quit. Could not. The government says addiction takes away your freedom to choose.

[01]06:52:46

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) Even tobacco companies now admit nicotine's addictive, but does that mean it really denies smokers' freedom? That they're helplessly chained to a terrible drug? Or is it possible that many smokers enjoy the experience of smoking? Many talk about it the way others talk about listening to music or having sex.

[01]06:53:06

STEVEN LOZOWICKI, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

It's the most wonderful experience that you can possibly go through. It's so satisfying.

[01]06:53:12

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) We talked to this group of smokers and ex-smokers. These four have quit, these four still smoke.

[01]06:53:18

STEVEN LOZOWICKI, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

It is so, so fulfilling, at your core.

[01]06:53:24

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

People like to smoke. They like the activity. They like the ritual of smoke. They like the sensation of smoke. That doesn't have anything to do with nicotine. That has to do with the behavioral ceremony and ritual, which is really what's important to the person.

[01]06:53:37

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) It's what Hollywood's captured in so many movies. It's not just that the actors need something to do with their hands. Smoking looks cool. Hollywood shows what today many are reluctant to admit, lots of people just like to smoke.

[01]06:53:51

STEVEN LOZOWICKI, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

I can remember specific cigarettes. A snowstorm, standing under an eave and watching that curl of smoke, blue, gray, blue.

[01]06:54:05

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) As much as he loved it, Steven Lozowicki was able to quit.

[01]06:54:08

STEVEN LOZOWICKI, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

One night, I literally said, I didn't want to go out for another pack. I just got tired of it.

[01]06:54:15

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

Every time a person quits using cigarettes, they do it in the same way. They make a decision to stop using.

[01]06:54:25

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Jodi Valentino quit after smoking two and a half packs a day for years.

[01]06:54:30

JODI VALENTINO, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

When I really made a serious decision, it was over, it was done.

[01]06:54:34

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) For gym teacher John Divanny, the turning point came the night he began dating a girl who didn't like smoking.

[01]06:54:40

JOHN DIVANNY, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

I was about to get off the exit, had my last cigarette, threw it out the window. Within a year I was married.

[01]06:54:45

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) You seldom hear about those people who just quit on their own. No one's saying it's easy, but it may surprise you that quitting is not the exception, it's the rule. In fact, almost 60 percent of smokers have quit. That's 50 million Americans. It's obvious that people do have free will.

[01]06:55:03

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) Look at the numbers. For most of the last century, smoking in America went steadily up. Up through the Depression, through World War II. Then in 1964, the Surgeon General issued his famous warning. From that point, smoking steadily dropped.

[01]06:55:24

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

We need to give people more credit for controlling their behavior than we do.

[01]06:55:29

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Check out this experiment. At the University of Vermont, researchers pay pregnant women to quit. If tests like this show they're clean, they get vouchers worth six or \$7 at first, up to \$40 toward the end of the experiment. Janna Hamel had smoked 13 years, but then she quit when she got the vouchers.

[01]06:55:50

JANNA HAMEL, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

It was exciting to see my vouchers build up. We got crib sheets, blankets. I got three pairs of nice, expensive shoes for myself.

[01]06:56:02

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) You'd think having a healthy baby would be more important than crib sheets or shoes. But the more immediate reward of the voucher is more powerful, says lead researcher Stephen Higgins.

[01]06:56:12

STEVEN HIGGINS, UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

So we can bring something that seems somewhat trivial, a voucher worth \$10 or \$15 into play. But by delivering it immediately, it's more effective.

[01]06:56:25

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

The fact that people will quit when they're paid money just goes to show you that they aren't enslaved to a physiological or genetically-based addiction.

[01]06:56:36

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) But the drug research establishment insists most addicts are enslaved. They don't have free will. But if some can quit, they have free will.

[01]06:56:44

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

But some can't quit.

[01]06:56:46

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) But most quit, right? I mean, haven't 50 million Americans quit tobacco, and tobacco is the toughest?

[01]06:56:53

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

For some people, yes. That doesn't mean that it isn't a disease.

[01]06:56:56

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Yes, it does, says Schaler.

[01]06:56:58

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

Smoking is something that you can willfully control. But once you have cancer, you can't choose to stop having cancer.

[01]06:57:07

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) We asked Schaler to bring his ideas to our group of smokers.

[01]06:57:11

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

I submit that every single thing that you do, you do because you want to do. So if you continue smoking, it's 'cause you want to smoke. And when you quit, it's because you want to quit.

[01]06:57:21

FEMALE ONE, CIGARETTE SMOKER

So you think there's nothing in nicotine that's addicting?

[01]06:57:23

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

There's no such thing as an addicting substance.

[01]06:57:25

STEVEN LOZOWICKI, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

Oh, baloney.

[01]06:57:27

FEMALE ONE, CIGARETTE SMOKER

I have a problem with what you say.

[01]06:57:28

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Most of the group did at first, even the ones who'd quit smoking. But after a while, Johanna Laurent started to waver.

[01]06:57:35

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

Does a part of you ever say to yourself, "I'm lying when I say I can't quit?"

[01]06:57:41

JOHANNA LAURENT, CIGARETTE SMOKER

Yeah.

[01]06:57:43

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Soon she was convinced, and trying to convince the others.

[01]06:57:46

JOHANNA LAURENT, CIGARETTE SMOKER

No, listen to me. If you decide to choose to stop smoking, you can.

[01]06:57:51

MALE THREE, CIGARETTE SMOKER

I can't. You can't right now.

[01]06:57:52

JOHANNA LAURENT, CIGARETTE SMOKER

Yes, you can. We just choose not to.

[01]06:57:55

FEMALE ONE, CIGARETTE SMOKER

I don't think it's fair to turn around and say to somebody, "yes, you can." You don't know him.

[01]06:58:00

JOHANNA LAURENT, CIGARETTE SMOKER

Listen. You know what?

[01]06:58:01

FEMALE ONE, CIGARETTE SMOKER

You don't know him.

[01]06:58:02

JOHANNA LAURENT, CIGARETTE SMOKER

You're not listening to me. I said, you got to believe that you have the choice. . .

[01]06:58:06

FEMALE ONE, CIGARETTE SMOKER

Do you wanna stop smoking? You say you wanted to.

[01]06:58:08

JOHANNA LAURENT, CIGARETTE SMOKER

Yeah, you know what?

[01]06:58:08

FEMALE ONE, CIGARETTE SMOKER

So how come you haven't?

[01]06:58:08

JOHANNA LAURENT, CIGARETTE SMOKER

Because I haven't made the choice. And I have to be responsible for that. I haven't said, "you know what, Johanna? That's it. Choose it."

[01]06:58:16

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Shortly after this interview, Johanna did choose it. After 20 years of smoking, she just stopped. Which raises the question, if addiction is a choice. . .

[01]06:58:26

MALE FOUR, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

Who came up with the slogan or the term addiction?

[01]06:58:30

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

The idea that addiction is a disease really came from attitudes about alcohol. Benjamin Rush, who's considered the father of American psychiatry, pronounced chronic drunkenness to be a disease.

[01]06:58:43

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) But calling addiction a disease didn't mean it was one.

[01]06:58:46

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

He didn't just call drunkenness a disease, he said that people who had black skin had a congenital form of leprosy called negritude. He said that if you didn't join the revolutionary cause, you had a disease called "revolutionary."

[01]06:58:59

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) But the idea of alcoholism and other addictions as diseases had taken hold, and it's only spread since.

[01]06:59:07

MALE FOUR, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

So it's just the terminology that we're really talking about.

[01]06:59:09

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

But the terminology is very important. Because, if you ask people to change the terminology, all kinds of things change. You see?

[01]06:59:16

MALE FOUR, FORMER CIGARETTE SMOKER

Yeah.

[01]06:59:17

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

If you say, "I won't" instead of "I can't," you have a different experience. If you say, "it's a choice not a disease," well then insurance companies may not reimburse for that. You see? If you say it's a choice, then the tobacco companies may not be slammed for millions of dollars.

[01]06:59:34

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) And above all, many experts say, if you say it's a choice, you can quit.

[01]06:59:40

ANNOUNCER

They're fat, and they're not going to take it anymore.

[01]06:59:43

FEMALE TEN, FAT ACTIVIST

I would like every manufacturer, every airline, every theater to start catering to me. I need to be pampered.

[01]06:59:50

ANNOUNCER

Does she? Or should she be doing more of this? When "Help Me, I Can't Help Myself with John Stossel" returns.

[GRAPHICS: HELP ME, I CAN'T HELP MYSELF WITH JOHN STOSSEL]

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

[01]07:03:30

ANNOUNCER

"Help Me, I Can't Help Myself" continues. Once again, John Stossel.

[01]07:03:35

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) If addiction's a disease, then you're kind of helpless. If you can't control your addiction, the rest of us should accommodate your illness. So where does eating too much fit into this?

[01]07:03:52

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) The government says 2-thirds of us are overweight. We're eating more than ever, and many people say they can't stop.

[01]07:03:59

OPRAH WINFREY, TALK SHOW HOST

It really is like a disease. It is addiction.

[01]07:04:02

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Is it an addiction? I pig out. After dinner, I often eat several chocolate chip cookies, and then, I hate to admit this, two or three dove bars. But the next day, when I feel my gut hanging over my belt, I cut back. Can't others cut back? Are they physically addicted? Steven Dewey says, yes. People who are overweight, some cannot help it?

[01]07:04:27

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

Absolutely. We have people that we work with who have to have chocolate.

[01]07:04:31

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) But I crave chocolate, but I control it.

[01]07:04:34

STEPHEN DEWEY, BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABS

Well, you're lucky then. Part of your disease hasn't obviously progressed to the point where you lose control.

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[01]07:04:39

KAY SHEPPARD, AUTHOR "FOOD ADDICTION"

We who have lost the control over the amount we eat are considered to be food addicted. Does everybody identify with that concept?

[01]07:04:47

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) In meetings all around America, Kay Sheppard tells people your bodies are programmed to be addicted. Her books have sold 160,000 copies.

[01]07:04:56

KAY SHEPPARD, AUTHOR "FOOD ADDICTION"

We're born with a defective gene. And as soon as we pick up that first lollipop, we're on our way. So we have alcoholics, cocaine addicts, nicotine addicts and obese people.

[01]07:05:17

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Many here say they are out of control.

[01]07:05:19

FEMALE TWO, HELP GROUP ATTENDEE

As if I had no choice at all. I would walk over broken glass to get to my food when I'm in the disease.

[01]07:05:28

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) It's not just a matter of willpower, says Sheppard.

[01]07:05:31

KAY SHEPPARD, AUTHOR "FOOD ADDICTION"

It's biogenetic. The same thing determines eye color, hair color, and whether we're addicts or not addicts.

[01]07:05:40

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Demonstrators around America agree with that. Since you are born this way, they say, you should just love your fat. In Boston, the Association to Advance Fat Acceptance once held a rally to demand "fat rights." They shouldn't have to adjust to society's expectation that they lose weight, they say, society should meet their special needs 'cause they cannot change.

[01]07:06:02

FEMALE THREE, EVENT ATTENDEE

It's gonna be easier to change society than it is to change my body.

[01]07:06:05

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Really?

[01]07:06:06

FEMALE THREE, EVENT ATTENDEE

So that's what I'm working on. Really.

[01]07:06:08

FEMALE TEN, FAT ACTIVIST

I would like every manufacturer, every airline, every theater to start catering to me. I need to be pampered.

[01]07:06:15

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Fat activists say it should be illegal for ballet schools to favor the thin. And illegal for airlines to charge obese people more if they occupy, say, two seats. Charging for two seats is "sizism."

[01]07:06:27

FEMALE FOUR, FAT ACTIVIST

"Sizism" is akin to ageism, racism and sexism.

[01]07:06:31

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) This is not like ageism or sexism. You could change. All you have to do is eat less.

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[01]07:06:36

FEMALE FIVE, FAT ACTIVIST

I'm eating three square meals a day and you want to take that away one of them? You want to take away two of them? How hungry do I have to be to make you happy?

[01]07:06:41

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) But you're equating sexism and racism with "fatism." And I'm just saying, you don't have to be fat.

[01]07:06:48

FEMALE FIVE, FAT ACTIVIST

I need the government to enact legislation that makes it possible for me and my fat sisters and brothers to get equal treatment in jobs, in health care, in accommodations in the public.

[01]07:06:57

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) They're getting their wish. San Francisco recently passed a law prohibiting discrimination based on weight. That means that fitness companies that want to hire instructors who look like this should also hire instructors who look like this, Jennifer Portnick wanted to be a jazzercise instructor, but jazzercise rejected her saying instructors must have a fit appearance. Portnick's web-site says she is fit. You can be fat and fit?

[01]07:07:25

JENNIFER PORTNICK, EXERCISE INSTRUCTOR

Amazingly, it's true. The healthiest, the happiest person I can be happens to be 230 pounds.

[01]07:07:30

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) After jazzercise wouldn't hire Portnick, she filed a complaint with the city of San Francisco and won. Jazzercise has agreed to start hiring fat fitness instructors. Why did she have to force jazzercise to change? Couldn't she just start a class on her own? Actually, she did. That that's what this is. And she's doing well. I went one day and was impressed. She and the others in the class worked hard. Good for them. But why force jazzercise to do it your way?

[01]07:07:59

FEMALE SIX, EXERCISE CLASS ATTENDEE

It's a diversity issue. If Jennifer was an African-American or Hispanic, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

[01]07:08:06

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Race and body size are both predetermined? I accept that losing weight is tougher for them than for me, but they cannot lose it? This is their genetic destiny? Dr. Schaler says that's nonsense. They could take the weight off.

[01]07:08:22

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(OC) Genes make a difference. I can eat a lot and I don't get fat. Other people, the fat just seems to grow on them.

[01]07:08:29

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

You may process food differently because of your genes. It doesn't mean, regardless of what they say, that they can't control their behavior. Because people control their behavior all the time.

[01]07:08:38

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) It's only recently that so many Americans have stopped controlling their behavior. In 1960, only 13 percent of Americans were obese. Now it's more than 30. Did our genes suddenly change? People from other cultures look at fat Americans like the fat rights demonstrators as oddities to be photographed. It's a topic of conversation among immigrant groups. Americans look different?

[01]07:09:04

FEMALE SEVEN, IMMIGRANT

So big.

[01]07:09:06

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) This group says fat's one of the first things they noticed when they came to America.

[01]07:09:10

FEMALE EIGHT, IMMIGRANT

All of a sudden they're like, they're like, just so much bigger. And they seem to think that's normal.

[01]07:09:17

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) It's not normal, they say. It's what you Americans eat.

[01]07:09:20

FEMALE SEVEN, IMMIGRANT

Everybody eat a lot.

[01]07:09:22

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) They couldn't believe the size of our refrigerators.

[01]07:09:28

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) They were stunned by serving sizes in homes and restaurants.

[01]07:09:32

MALE FIVE, IMMIGRANT

"Dim sum" in Hong Kong, "dim sum" means, you know, literal translation is "little bit of heart." Little being the key word. Here, "dim sum" is huge.

[01]07:09:43

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Now you may say, wait a second, these other people have different body types. Svelte's the image we have of Asians, but when they eat a lot, they get fat, too. And in America, increasingly, we eat more and move less.

[01]07:09:57

FEMALE NINE, IMMIGRANT

Everything seems to be more lazy. You can drive to everything. I've never seen a drive-in bank before. You can drive to your pharmacy. You don't even have to get out anywhere.

[01]07:10:07

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) That's what really matters, say the experts, the fact that we move too little and eat too much.

[01]07:10:13

MALE SIX, IMMIGRANT

Here, America, there's plenty of food. So you keep eating, eating, eating. That's why you, you grow fat. It's the food make the difference, not the gene.

[01]07:10:24

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) If it's not the genes, you have a choice. When we return, we'll look at those who promise to help you make that choice.

[01]07:10:32

ANNOUNCER

If you're rich and addicted, there are places for you.

[01]07:10:35

CHERYL BROWN, MARKETING DIRECTOR, SIERRA TUCSON

The pool area here for example we use for body image work.

[01]07:10:39

ANNOUNCER

But does paying more always help you more? When "Help Me, I Can't Help Myself with John Stossel" returns.

[GRAPHICS: HELP ME, I CAN'T HELP MYSELF WITH JOHN STOSSEL]

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

[01]07:13:53

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) "Help Me. I Can't Help Myself." If that's how you feel about your cigarette habit, or drug or alcohol addiction, or even your lust for food, there are lots of professionals who will say "good, you understand you need our help."

[01]07:14:15

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) This treatment hospital charges addicts more than \$25,000 a month. They offer all kinds of things I wouldn't have thought were treatments for addiction.

[01]07:14:24

CHERYL BROWN, MARKETING DIRECTOR, SIERRA TUCSON

We use equine-assisted psychotherapy here.

[01]07:14:26

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Cheryl Brown, their marketing supervisor, gave us the tour.

[01]07:14:30

CHERYL BROWN, MARKETING DIRECTOR, SIERRA TUCSON

This is our climbing wall. It's another way for them to explore how they're keeping themselves stuck.

[01]07:14:37

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Sierra Tucson says it's up to the addict to change, but they also say addiction's a disease and most addicts need help.

[01]07:14:45

MICHAEL SCOTT, MEDICAL DIRECTOR, SIERRA TUCSON

If you think it's not a disease, that it's a weakness, the person will continue to try to fix it themselves, in which case he's gonna fail.

[01]07:14:52

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Medical director Michael Scott paints a bleak picture for those who don't get help.

[01]07:14:56

MICHAEL SCOTT, MEDICAL DIRECTOR, SIERRA TUCSON

They will often end up dead, divorced, homeless. It just ends up in disaster.

[01]07:15:03

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) To prevent disaster, they offer a program based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous, plus therapy and all sorts of things.

[01]07:15:11

CHERYL BROWN, MARKETING DIRECTOR, SIERRA TUCSON

The pool area here, for example, we use for body image work.

[01]07:15:15

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) At Sierra Tucson, they have facials, body wraps, tai chi.

[01]07:15:21

CHERYL BROWN, MARKETING DIRECTOR, SIERRA TUCSON

She's really great at helping people's chi start to move.

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[01]07:15:24

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) You might think the more you pay, the better the treatment. After all, celebrities go to places like Promises, overlooking the Pacific in Malibu.

[01]07:15:42

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(OC) And experts agree, for people with severe problems, inpatient care may be best. But many experts say for most addicts, cheaper outpatient programs can work just as well. Hazelden has research that claims 53 percent of its clients were drug-free a year later. Sierra Tucson claims 56.5 percent were clean for at least six months. That's pretty good. But be wary of clinics that make extreme success claims.

[01]07:16:12

DOCTOR JEFFREY SCHALER, PSYCHOLOGIST

They're taking advantage of people who are suffering in order to make money. They distort the treatment success rates.

[01]07:16:20

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Reporting on addiction treatments over the years, I've learned that success stories may turn out to mean people quit for a week, or just 'til the end of the program. Aren't you conning people, desperate people a little bit here? I mean, 80 percent success rate, pay \$500. The 80 percent success claim was based on a research paper by the founder of the clinic, here under arrest for racketeering. The government shut his clinics down.

[01]07:16:47

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) We are used to being skeptical of amazing claims made by weight loss programs. We should also be skeptical of the numbers used by many of those who sell addiction cures. Nicotine patch makers claim the patch will dramatically improve your odds of quitting smoking.

[01]07:17:13

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS (CONTINUED)

(VO) They do have clinical trials that support that. But the most recent big study, published by "The Journal of the American Medical Association" says in the real world, the patch has proved no more useful than not using a patch in quitting long term.

[01]07:17:26

DOCTOR STANTON PEELE, AUTHOR "DISEASING OF AMERICA"

We're selling nicotine patches, we're selling the Betty Ford Center. We tell people, "you can never get over an addiction on your own. You have to come to us and buy something to get over an addiction." It's not true and it's dangerous to tell them that.

[01]07:17:38

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Dangerous because some experts say it deters people from trying to get over their addictions on their own. And while treatment's helped a lot of people, surprisingly, studies show, most people who have conquered their addictions did it on their own.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

[01]07:20:47

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) If you're addicted to something, whose fault is that? The message we often hear from the treatment facilities is, it's not the addict's fault.

[01]07:20:55

CHERYL BROWN, MARKETING DIRECTOR, SIERRA TUCSON

It's not their fault that they ended up in the situation any more than it's somebody's fault that they ended up with blue hair or brown eyes and brown hair or blonde hair.

[01]07:21:03

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I think that's (CENSORED BY NETWORK).

[01]07:21:05

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) James Frey says it was his fault.

[01]07:21:07

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I mean, people are willing to let you use any excuse you're willing to give them. If you want to say, "oh, it's not my fault, it's genetics." They'll say, "oh, okay, can I give you a hug?" If you want to say, "oh, it's not my fault I have this disease," they'll say, "okay, well, you can do it again." And that's, that's pathetic.

[01]07:21:25

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Frey says he just made the decision to get control of his life. It happened after he woke up from a binge.

[01]07:21:31

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

My nose was broken. My eye socket was broken. I made the decision to go to rehab at that time.

[01]07:21:36

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) His parents paid for him to go to the famous Hazelden clinic where he dried out, but he had no use for the group therapy and disease theory they tried to push.

[01]07:21:45

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I thought all that stuff was ridiculous. So I didn't, I didn't do it.

[01]07:21:50

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) How did you stop?

[01]07:21:52

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I stopped because I have my own 12-step program, and the first 11 steps don't mean (CENSORED BY NETWORK) and the 12th is "don't do it." And I didn't do it.

[01]07:22:01

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) He doesn't even follow the common advice that addicts must stay away from old temptations. They say you shouldn't go into bars. You do?

[01]07:22:10

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

Because I didn't want to live in fear of alcohol.

[01]07:22:14

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) He drinks soda while his friends drink beer. And he says he doesn't feel he's missing anything.

[01]07:22:19

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I don't have any desire to have a drink. I made the decision not to do it. And that's all it was, was a decision.

[01]07:22:25

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) The sex addict says that's what finally worked for her, finally deciding that she had the power to stop.

[01]07:22:32

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

Now, I know that that's true. And my 11th therapist basically said what you just said.

[01]07:22:39

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) But ten therapists, nobody said, "just stop it, don't do it"?

[01]07:22:42

SUE SILVERMAN, AUTHOR "LOVE SICK"

No, no, no. None of them did.

[01]07:22:48

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Now some people do need the help of a clinic or therapy group. No one's saying everyone can quit on his own.

[01]07:22:54

DOCTOR SALLY SATEL, PSYCHIATRIST

There is a subpopulation of people who do need the help. There's no question about that.

[01]07:23:04

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Here at Amity, a center in Los Angeles, they're confronting a resident who left and smoked crack. The group pounces on addicts who use the same old excuses they've all used. Six weeks after this, he was still in treatment and clean.

[01]07:23:34

GREG, RECOVERING ADDICT

But I've been to everything from Betty Ford to Shick. Betty Ford's got nicer drapes and better beds.

[01]07:23:41

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Greg was addicted to cocaine for 25 years before he came here and chose to quit.

[01]07:23:46

GREG, RECOVERING ADDICT

My choice is that I want to, I want to finally get a life, you know.

[01]07:23:53

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Choosing is what it takes, they say, making that decision.

[01]07:23:57

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

You can't tell people, "this is all your fault and there's nothing you can do about it." You have to tell them, "this is all your fault and you can make it all better if you want to." You can rebuild your life if you want to. You just have to make the decision to do it.

[01]07:24:12

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(VO) Frey says he still gets drunk, still gets high, now he just does it differently.

[01]07:24:17

JAMES FREY, AUTHOR "A MILLION LITTLE PIECES"

I get drunk on walking my dogs. I get drunk on, you know, kissing my wife. I get drunk on a good book. Getting drunk is just doing something that feels good.

[01]07:24:29

JOHN STOSSEL, ABC NEWS

(OC) Calling addiction a choice may sound harsh, but it's actually good news because it means we have the power. We're not helpless victims. Whether it's drugs, alcohol or anything else, we have the strength to conquer our bad habits. That's our broadcast for tonight. I'm John Stossel. Thanks for watching.

[EOF999]

[END OF TAPE]